

monarch}" and Church ; and the Protestant principle of individual right to think and worship untrammelled by tradition was to triumph in the end, triumph through revolution, in spite of long struggle and semi-triumphant repression. Its triumph was a triumph for humanity, though theological Protestantism might have been less intolerantly aggressive at times, and less unfaithful to its own spirit. But then it was at this stage war to the knife between two opposing systems, and certainly that system which acted on persecuting principles, wherever it got the chance, had no right to accuse the aggressive system of its opponents, which, at first at least, was compelled to fight and suffer for its existence.

The ominous fact in the presence of this insubordinate, self-assertive spirit was the weakness of the Government. Catherine de Medici was a woman of great intelligence, full of address, astute, unscrupulous, apt in business, averse to extremes. But she was a foreigner, and exposed to all the prejudice and opposition which her Italian birth excited. The King of Navarre, whom she made Lieutenant-General of the kingdom in place of the Duke of Guise, was a weak, vacillating councillor, and L'Hopital's reforming ideas, though sagacious, proved impracticable. The Colloquy of Poissy failed to reconcile the Protestant and Catholic theologians. The Edict of St Germain (Jan. 1562), which virtually granted toleration, stirred the fanaticism of the bigots, who were led by the triumvirate—the Duke of Guise, the Constable Mont-Hi orency, and Marshal St Andre—to madness. Their madness burst out in the massacre by Guise's soldiers of a Huguenot congregation at Vassy in March 1562. This bloody outrage proclaimed that toleration was an impossible policy, if the bigots could help it. It was a challenge to fight thrown down by Catholic to Huguenot, and even Coligny, who had fought shy of the conspiracy of Amboise, no longer hesitated to take it up from a stern sense of duty. Others hastened to unsheathe the sword from personal and political motives. Among these was Condi, who, though by this time a confirmed Huguenot, hated Guise (who secured possession of the king and his mother and removed them from Fontainebleau to Paris), as a rival, and was resolved to assert his position in the State as a prince of the blood. A number